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# enterprising Women

16th ANNUAL  
Enterprising Women of the Year Awards

COMMEMORATIVE ISSUE!

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# Daring to Slow Down



Last fall, I attended my very first NAWBO National Conference. It had been a long day of travel to get to the opening gala, so after I got cleaned up, I threw on my signature baseball cap—the one with a sparkling breast cancer ribbon made from Swarovski crystals. I was mingling with friends and new acquaintances at the gala when I felt a tap on my shoulder.

“Survivor?” a stranger asked.

Without missing a beat, I replied, “Survivor? Nah, I really don’t like that show.”

It took me a moment to remember the hat I was wearing. Breast cancer survivor, not reality TV show *Survivor*.

I realized I was in full-on businesswoman mode. We are strong, we multitask, we never slow down. We run successful companies, we treat our employees and our colleagues with the utmost respect, and we are home to cook dinner (or order it—most nights, anyway).

Those few words describe just about every woman entrepreneur I have had the pleasure of getting to know.

I want to introduce myself to all of you women warriors! My name is Jill Kerrigan, and I’m honored to share a bit about my journey with you. I’ve been running my

own business, JAK Creative Design, in the Chicago area for more than 22 years.

But last spring (April 19; I remember it clearly), as I was unpacking from one business trip and packing for another, something happened that would ultimately change not only my life, but the lives of every single person close to me.

I was simply reaching for a towel on the highest shelf in my linen closet when I felt something. Who could have known that something would stop this unstoppable mother, wife, and entrepreneur in her tracks?

Yep, reality set in quickly. Not only was I not in complete control, I was indeed actually human. A week later, I was diagnosed with triple-negative stage 2 breast cancer.

At that moment, I had no idea of the challenges and the many ups and downs that I would be facing over the next 10 months. Never a real fan of scary rides at Six Flags, I was about to get on the largest roller coaster God could have created, with high points and the lowest of lows.

My journey has allowed me to come to grips with the fact that we superwomen are vulnerable. It has also taught me how women truly support other women without question or hesitation, especially through groups like NAWBO, the WBENC, WBDC, and *Enterprising Women*. It’s been far from easy, but also full of laughter and support!

Oh, yes, there were many tears in between, and days I couldn’t get out of bed after a treatment (like every entrepreneur out there, my laptop was a second pillow). But I have learned so much about myself, my family, my friends, and my fellow women entrepreneurs.

What I have learned about myself during this long and unplanned *bump* in the road is that I am vulnerable. No matter how successful I am in raising my family or how well my company may be doing, there is a higher power I can never be the boss of, the mother of, or the wife of. I do not have input into the final say. Wow. What an incredible eye-opener that has been.

To be vulnerable means to be weak,



right? I used to think so. But I can now tell you that this could not be further from the truth. Remember my signature baseball hat with the ribbon bling I mentioned earlier?

By the time the closing awards reception of the NAWBO conference rolled around, I no longer needed to hide under it. That's what happens when you allow

yourself to be vulnerable. It opens up the possibility of others to come in to support you, encourage you, and empower you—and that's just what my fellow NAWBO members did for me. For that, I am very thankful.

I'm also thankful to *Enterprising Women* for allowing me to write about my experiences, and to you, readers, for taking a few minutes out of your busy schedules to read about them.

Throughout the year, I plan to continue to contribute to *Enterprising Women* magazine to share even more of my journey. Here's to all of you women entrepreneurs! Cheers—and then some! ☺

JILL A. KERRIGAN is the founder, CEO, and fearless leader of JAK Creative Design, an independent branding and design agency based in the western suburbs of Chicago. Jill is a member of NAWBO, WBENC-certified, WEConnect International, and the Advisory Board for *Enterprising Women*.

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**Fran Biderman-Gross**  
Strategista